



# NEWS

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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August 11, 1997

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## **SERVICE PROPOSES EXPANDED WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASONS**

With breeding duck populations the highest on record, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed today to generally expand the frameworks for season lengths and bag limits for the 1997-98 duck hunting season.

The Service also proposed to continue the popular "Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day" for a second year to encourage parents and other adults to take children hunting. Forty states held the youth day last year and it was widely considered to be a success.

"Most species of ducks are well above their long-term average because of unusually good weather and continued habitat conservation efforts by hunters and other conservationists," said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "This is the third year in a row we've been able to offer more hunting opportunity in the seasonal frameworks."

The Service is predicting a fall migration of 92 million ducks, topping last year's 90 million and the highest on record since 1970. The favorable fall flight estimate follows on the heels of the Service's earlier breeding duck survey, which counted 42.6 million breeding ducks in key nesting areas, the highest level since the survey began in 1955.

Clark noted that hunters nationwide harvested 13.9 million ducks last year, a million more than in the 1995-96 season.

"It is quite possible we could have another banner hunting season," she said. "However, we must keep in mind that increases in duck populations don't always translate into more success in the field for hunters. Weather during the season itself and the availability of habitat still play major roles in determining hunter success."

Highlights of the proposed late-season frameworks follow:

**Atlantic Flyway**--(Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia)

**Ducks**--A hunting season of not more than 60 days between October 1, 1997, and January 20, 1998. The proposed daily bag limit was increased from five ducks last year to six this year and may include no more than four mallards (two hens), one black duck,

three pintails, one mottled duck, one fulvous whistling duck, two wood ducks, two redheads, and one canvasback. The season on harlequins is closed. The proposed daily bag limit of mergansers is five, only one of which may be a hooded merganser.

Geese--For light geese, states may select a 107-day season between October 1 and March 10, with a daily bag limit of 10 geese and 30 geese in possession. For Atlantic population Canada geese, the season is suspended. However, special or experimental seasons and regular seasons to harvest resident and other populations of migratory Canada geese are authorized in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. For Atlantic brant, the season length has been extended from 30 to 50 days but the bag limit remains at two.

Mississippi Flyway--(Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin)

Ducks--Hunting seasons of not more than 60 days between October 4, 1997, and January 18, 1998. The proposed daily bag limit is six and may include no more than four mallards (two hens), three mottled ducks, one black duck, three pintails, two wood ducks, one canvasback, and two redheads. The proposed daily bag limit of mergansers is five, only one of which may be a hooded merganser.

Geese--Generally, states may select 70-day seasons for dark geese between October 4, 1997, and January 31, 1998, and 107-day seasons for light geese between October 4, 1997, and March 10, 1998. The daily bag limit is 10 light geese, 3 Canada geese, 2 white-fronted geese, and 2 brant. There are, however, numerous area-specific restrictions and exceptions to these frameworks.

Central Flyway--(Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming.)

Ducks--In the High Plains Mallard Management Unit (roughly west of the 100th Meridian), a 97-day season is proposed between October 4, 1997, and January 18, 1998. The last 23 days may start no earlier than December 13, 1997. A 74-day season is proposed for the remainder of the Central Flyway. The proposed daily bag limit is six and may include no more than five mallards (two hens), one mottled duck, three pintails, one canvasback, two redheads, and two wood ducks.

Geese--Seasons for dark geese are proposed from October 4, 1997, to January 31, 1998, except in the Western Goose Zone in Texas where the season may extend to February 15, 1998. Season lengths are 86 days in the Eastern Tier and 107 days in the Western Tier. For light geese, the proposed 107-day seasons may extend from October 4, 1997, to March 10, 1998, except for selected areas in Nebraska where the closing date is February 15, 1998. Goose bag limits vary by state and management unit.

Pacific Flyway--(Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming)

Ducks--A 107-day season between October 4, 1997, and January 18, 1998. The proposed daily bag limit is seven ducks, including no more than two mallard hens, three pintails, two redheads, and one canvasback.

Geese--A 100-day season is proposed in most parts of the flyway between October 4, 1997, and January 18, 1998. Bag limits are generally three light geese and two to four dark geese. Other restrictions vary by state and zone. For brant, the season lengths are 16 days in Oregon and Washington and 30 days in California, with a two-bird limit.

The Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day, proposed in July, would be available to all states. This day would provide young people an extra hunting day before or after the regular waterfowl season. The day would have to be held outside of any regular duck season on either a weekend or holiday when youths would have the maximum opportunity to participate. The day could be held up to 14 days before or after any regular duck season framework or within any split of a regular duck season. Each state wildlife agency will select its day for this special hunt.

Participants would have to be 15 or younger and accompanied by an adult at least 18 years old. The adult would not be allowed to hunt ducks but could participate in other open seasons. Under the proposal, the daily bag limit and species restrictions would be consistent with the regular duck season in the flyway. Details about the Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day and other early-season issues were published in the July 23 Federal Register and public comments were accepted through August 5.

Additional details about the proposed late-season hunting regulations will be published in the Federal Register soon. Public comments on late-season regulations will be accepted through September 4, 1997, and should be addressed to the Chief, Office of Migratory Bird Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, 1849 C Street, NW., Mail Stop 634 ARLSQ, Washington, DC 20240.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 511 national wildlife refuges encompassing 92 million acres, as well as 68 national fish hatcheries.

The agency also enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on angling and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.